
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District:	Sheridan-Kalorama Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	1901 24th Street, NW	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	June 28, 2012	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	12-346	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Amanda Molson and Steve Callcott	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Representing the owner, Ferguson & Shamamian Architects and architect Christian Zapatka seek conceptual design review for construction of a roof parapet at 1901 24th Street, NW in the Sheridan-Kalorama Historic District.

Property Description

Constructed in 1925, 1901 24th Street, NW was designed by T.J.D. Fuller for building owner Mrs. Victor Kauffmann. Mr. Kauffmann had previously (1910) worked with architect T.J.D. Fuller on the design for a Beaux-Arts townhouse at 1708 New Hampshire Avenue, NW in the Dupont Circle Historic District. Kauffmann, the literary editor for the *Washington Evening Star*, was the son of Samuel Kauffmann, who served as the president of the Evening Star Newspaper Company and the Corcoran Gallery of Art.

Designed in the Georgian Revival style and built for the considerable sum of \$55,000, this detached brick residence features a block modillion cornice, stone corner quoins, an ornate stone door surround capped by a broken pediment, and a slate-covered mansard roof punctuated by dormer windows. Although this particular house was not designed to include a parapet, it was not uncommon for buildings of the Georgian Revival style to include a balustrade encircling the flat portion of the roof. These parapets were typically designed as low, visually light, open railings, or (less commonly) featured a combination of balustrades interspersed intermittently with solid panels.¹

Proposal

During a recently completed renovation, a series of mechanical units were installed on the flat portion of the roof. Though not prominently visible from immediately in front of the house, the units soon become visible from wider vantage points and in long views from various areas of the historic district. The owners wishes to screen these views by adding a painted wood parapet wall of 42" in height around the periphery of the flat roof.

¹ The latter balustrade option was used by Fuller in his Beaux Arts design for Kauffmann's townhouse in Dupont Circle.

Evaluation

The Board has been reluctant to approve proposals for additive, historicist architectural features, which are supplemental to the architect's original design intent and which are often indistinguishable as entirely new elements. Such proposals are certainly inappropriate when they are not, in fact, historically appropriate or accurate for the style and era of construction of the house and instead attempt to awkwardly fuse together multiple styles to create a misleading composition of parts. For example, the Board did not approve a recent proposal to add a front porch to 2938 Macomb Street, NW in the Cleveland Park Historic District (HPA #12-156), finding that the Dutch Colonial Revival style of the subject property very rarely included front porches and instead featured character-defining stoop covers, particularly in this neighborhood.

However, the Board has also taken a somewhat more nuanced approach in cases where an argument can successfully be made that the additive feature improves an existing or new condition and where the additive feature is itself compatible with the character of the affected property. In an example case, the Board recently considered a proposal to add antennas to the very visible rooftop of 801 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE (HPA #11-224) in the Capitol Hill Historic District. The Board ultimately approved the installation with screening provided by stealth covers taking the form of small penthouses not uncommonly found on commercial rooftops.

This more nuanced approach introduces the debatable (and perhaps subjective) question of whether it is ultimately less distracting to see these modern conveniences for what they truly are, or to attempt to screen them with additive elements. It also arguably opens the door for potentially precedent-setting cases in which the Board may attempt to solve a comparatively short-term and even reversible problem by approving a permanent solution. That said, a good argument can also be made that exceptions, when relatively minor, may be worthwhile in the interest of achieving larger aims.

The applicants are presenting two options for Board consideration – one that is comprised of solid panels in its entirety (Option #1), and one in which a more open railing is interspersed with solid panels to allow some visibility through the parapet (Option #2). Although Option #1 has the potential to more completely obscure views of the mechanical units, this fully opaque option is also much less common to the Georgian Revival style and reads a heavy, visually dominant feature of the roof. Option #2 provides somewhat less comprehensive screening due to the insertion of railings in select sections, instead serving as a combination of screening and a meritorious distraction that appears as a less jarring addition. A mutated third option, in which Option #2 extends around only three-quarters of the roof, leaving the remaining quarter completely open, was recently brought to the attention of the HPO. This third option strays even further from being a historically appropriate solution, and it arguably does not address the mechanical unit visibility that is driving this application and potentially meriting some flexibility in this case.

The existence of visible mechanical units on the roof is an unfortunate condition, but it is one that will likely be with this house for many years to come. The applicants have selected a screening device that generally mimics a historically accurate design feature common to the

prevailing style and era of construction of this building, if not this particular house. Option #2, a largely open railing interspersed with solid panels to allow visibility and light through the parapet, is the most historically appropriate design and the recommended treatment if a parapet is deemed appropriate at all.

Considering the prevalence of this design feature on many buildings of this style and generation, the minimal impact of this additive feature in the totality of the building's character and mass, and the desire to minimize visual intrusions that disrupt the character of the historic district, the proposed parapet is not incompatible. However, a three-sided, interrupted parapet is not historically appropriate and is not recommended.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board:

- Determine the addition of a parapet as illustrated in applicant's Option 2 (four sided, with balusters) to be compatible with the character of this Georgian Revival house;
- And find the proposal consistent with the preservation act, as it will enhance the character of the historic district by largely obscuring visible rooftop mechanical units.
- The HPO recommends final approval be delegated to staff.